

CHAPTER 13

Playing at Hate: War Games, the Aryan World Congress, and the American Psyche

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“... You know about the Minnesota Rangers?”

“The militia guys?”

“Yeah. Skinheads. Some old Vietnam veterans, Gulf War veterans, bikers. They go around in long black coats, like in that *Matrix* movie. Even in the summer. Shave their heads....”

“... I went out to see Dick Worley, he’s the leader out there at their war grounds.”

“What are the war grounds?” Lucas asked.

“One of those paint-ball places. They play capture the flag, and all that. War games.”

John Sandford, *Hidden Prey*

In the fictionalized world of Lucas Davenport, the veteran Twin Cities’ cop of John Sandford’s “Prey” novels, the rise of hate groups, undercover militias, and deviant memberships is neatly and slickly aligned with practices like war games, capture-the-flag, and paint-ball. The alignment between leisure activities such as paint-ball and groups professing a variety of anti-government and anti-dominant-society beliefs may or may not exist in real terms; however, the belief system that makes Sandford’s “Prey” novels so successful sees such an alignment as plausible, if not credible.

In fact, popular culture texts such as mystery and thriller novels comprise an archipelago of artefacts that, together, are both *based upon* “reality” or fiction and *create* realities and fiction. As Denzin writes of the “mainstream Hollywood cinema,” so too might popular novels and popular texts serve to “dramaturgically enact the epiphanal moments of postmodernism” (1991: 63). These texts may be based on reality or not; urban legends blend with fiction, fiction blends with and borrows from factual cases. As Blackshaw and Crabbe (2004: 178) point out, discussing the influence of media practices upon Crabbe’s concept of “moral panic” in terms of, particularly, the gang bang/gang rape (“spit-roasting”) of one female by various members of a football club in the United Kingdom, “... as the assertion of

morality associated with the current crop of sensational sporting headlines suggests, the characterization of ‘deviant’ practice lives on in the popular imagination as much as it does within the discipline of sociology.”

As well as in the popular imagination and the discipline of sociology, the discussions surrounding “deviancy” revolve around political, imbalance-based, racialized, patriarchal power structures like the global media. Blackshaw and Crabbe point out that the consumption of such stories as the alleged rape of a woman by members of a football club has become more important to news outlets as a “presentation of rape and sexual deviance as a titillating performance for widespread public consumption” (2004: 178) as a consumable, seductive tidbit.

In a similar mediated performance, Dao (2005: A10) reports—in the powerful and well-respected *New York Times*—that “an American-born Muslim cleric was convicted ... of inciting followers to wage war against the United States ...”. Furthermore, it was pointed out, in post-9/11 rhetoric, that: “... a group of young men, several of them American-born converts, prepared themselves spiritually and physically for waging jihad in defense of Islam, prosecutors said, including *by playing paintball in rural Virginia*” (*ibid.*, emphasis added). Such urban legends, fictionalizations, and factual cases blur, and serve to [re]enact the texts of “larger-than-life persons” who try to “come to grips with the existential dilemmas of postmodernism” (Denzin 1991: 63).

In this chapter, I intend to discuss deviancy, the Aryan Nations (and Christian patriot groups), play, and gun culture as they intersect in the American psyche. The intersections and parallels among such seemingly disparate constructs align with one another within patriarchal, masculinist culture as it is embodied within the socialization of American males. The very strong representation of guns and gun culture within Christian patriot groups—indeed, within many conservative groups calling for their Constitutional “right to bear arms”—fosters a commitment by the culture to reinforce and reproduce such heightened awareness of guns.

Often, groups and individuals who display so-called “deviant” behaviors align somehow with others’ imagined expectations—so that, in the case of novels, life can imitate art as well as art imitating life. Or they may merely see their cause, as many of these groups do, as a sort of Christian *jihad*, so that groups like “... the Covenant, Sword and the Arm of the Lord’s [book] *Prepare War*” (Aho 1994: 70–1) (which advocates taking up arms against “sodomite homosexuals waiting in their lusts to rape,” “negro beasts who eat the flesh of men,” and “seed of Satan Jews sacrificing people in darkness”) will use hyperbole to attempt to incite their followers to action. But there is a long history involved in the seemingly “deviant” racist tradition of America, so that one comes away from exploration into that tradition wondering which comes first, life which seeks to annihilate other human beings, or art forms celebrating and memorializing philosophies that seek to annihilate other human beings. Enter the concept of “play.”

Play is considered by Huizinga (1955: 28) as “voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely

accepted but absolutely binding, having its aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy and the consciousness that it is ‘different’ from ‘ordinary life.’” The very juxtaposition of “play” with the concept of “hate” at first seems awkward and jarring; but if the combination is examined, one may see that the two concepts may co-exist, and might in some cases enhance one another. In fact, Huizinga wrote about the “play” element not only in life as grandly viewed, but within certain “civilized” forms of war:

Fighting, as a cultural function, always presupposes limiting rules, and it requires, to a certain extent anyway, the recognition of its play-quality. We can only speak of war as a cultural function so long as it is waged within a sphere whose members regard each other as equals or antagonists with equal rights; in other words its cultural function depends on its play-quality. This condition changes as soon as war is waged outside the sphere of equals, against groups not recognized as human beings and thus deprived of human rights—barbarians, devils, heathens, heretics and “lesser breeds without the law”. (pp. 89–90)

Thus, for Huizinga, the “cultural function” of a “play-quality” within war is dependent upon the warring parties’ recognition of some fundamental, agreed-upon, rule structures. Though one warring party may adhere to certain rules based upon an acceptance of “certain limitations for the sake of their own honour” (p. 90), this, in Huizinga’s view, lacks the constancy required for a true “ludic” element within war.

As one example of the play element constituted within Christian patriot groups’ psyches, “Louis Beam’s *Essays of a Klansman* … details a point system for earning the status of Aryan warrior. Liberal sociologists, for example, are worth but 1/500 a point each; the president of the United States rates a whole point” (Aho 1994: 71). Rules are structured such that “warriors” know their status at any given time.

In the case of what Aho (1990) calls Christian patriots (a generalized—and not terribly accurate—term I also will use throughout to identify the great variety of anti-establishment, anti-government, racist groups, used for brevity), rules do exist, hierarchical power structures abound, and terms of ludic behavior exist as well. If their forms of “play” are seen as “cultural performances,” many of the Christian patriots’ actions are relatively stable and predictable, like a dance of potential death.

In the case of many of these Christian patriot groups:

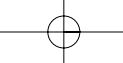
The idea of warfare only enters when a special condition of general hostility solemnly proclaimed is recognized as distinct from individual quarrels and family feuds. This distinction places war at one stroke in the agonistic as well as the ritual sphere. It is elevated to the level of holy causes, becomes a general matching of forces and a revelation of destiny; in other words it now forms part of that complex of ideas comprising justice, fate, and honour. As a sacred institution it is henceforth invested with all the ideal and material imagery common to the tribe. This is

not to say that war will now be waged strictly in accordance with a code of honour and in ritual form, for brutal violence will still assert itself; it only means that war will be seen as a sacred duty and in an honorable light, that it will be played out more or less in conformity with that ideal. (Huizinga 1955: 95)

In much of the Christian patriot rhetoric and ritual behaviors (which, Aho (1990) points out, are not unitary or even always consistent), there is the deep sense of moral justification: the sense of wronged justice, impending fate, and a deeply entrenched, hypermasculinist sense of honor, based in large part on male socialization practices that celebrate rugged individualism, the use and display of survival techniques, and a worldview that is certain and cocksure. In North America, a great deal of masculine socialization, particularly in Survivalist and Christian patriot culture, is also linked with guns and gun culture—but this link is seen as normative male socialization (cf. Jhally 1999).

The threads that commingle popular culture, hate, and masculine identity together remain virtual renderings of linkages until the virtual merges into the real. In the United States, these threads are nowhere more exemplified for popular and populist consumption than by mass-media renderings of school shooting perpetrators. For example, Jeff Weise, the seventeen-year-old Red Lake (MN) High School student who, in the spring of 2005, killed a total of eight people, including himself, “created comic books with ghastly drawings of people shooting each other and wrote stories about zombies. He dressed in black, wore eyeliner and apparently admired Hitler and called himself the ‘Angel of Death’ in German” (Forlitti 2005). In the popular imaginary, there is a strong connection between what some have come to term “home-grown terrorists” and the popular culture that, it is assumed, socializes them toward their anti-social behaviors and against governmental and societal strictures.

One thing is certain: by most accounts, the “racist underground” movement in America—which is not as underground as most mainstream media would have it—is flourishing, buoyed by mainstream America in the sureness of both its ideals and its aims. In fact, members of various and sundry anti-establishment groups call the dominant government in the United States the Zionist Occupation Government (ZOG), and find that this global statement can neatly encapsulate all their anger and energy towards what they term the Jewish “problem.” Of course, in a space that is ideologically framed as a “true” democracy, “good” fights against “evil” constantly (and often they are deeply enmeshed), so that whoever “wins” gets to claim the other as deviant. In the case of popular culture, those who oppose the dominant culture are by definition deviant, since popular culture by its implicit definition depends upon a critical mass, a dominant mainstream support framework. But dominant groups also depend upon “deviance” to establish and retain cultural boundaries of what is viewed as acceptable and what is not acceptable.



Explorations of Deviance Studies

But what is deviance, anyway? Becker (1973) discusses a variety of ways of looking at deviance. There is the laypersons' view of deviance, which Becker terms as "statistical" kinds of deviance: deviance, in this view, is "... anything that differs from what is most common ..." (p. 4). This model follows the dominant/non-dominant cultural norms of society, and sees "out-liers" as deviating from statistical norms set by the majority of members of a society. There is the "medical analogous" model of deviance, which terms the individual who is outside the norm as being in the "presence of a disease" (p. 5). There is the individual who demonstrates a "failure to obey group rules" (p. 8). But Becker, in his early, thorough examination of the concept of "deviance," sees all these definitions as centered around the individual and the individual's actions. He proposes a change in the point of view, one in which there is a different model of deviance from previous models, one that is centered on the actions of societies, in which "*social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance*" (p. 9, italics in original). In this model, society, not the individual, is the primary focus.

This definition, centered on the creation of rules whose existence makes possible the very concept of deviance, puts the onus upon group rather than individual action, upon set-up boundaries that individuals or non-dominant, less powerful groups may or may not resist. In this sense, then, deviance is, of course, socially constructed; but it is also tautologically monitored by those who have set up the original rules. Standpoint epistemology plays a large part in which group(s) are dominant (not merely numerically dominant, but also symbolically and culturally dominant), and which groups stand outside the "normative" behaviors—and what, in fact, constitutes both normative and deviant behaviors. In this sense, then, deviance depends upon normativity in order to remain viable; and also, normativity relies upon deviance to help police the bounds of what is constituted to be normativity.

But deviance is not merely seen as a form of resistance. In discussing punk style, Hebdige (1979) sees deviance as resistance to constructed norms, but also as a form of positive, pro-active emblematics: "the concept of signifying practice ... reflects exactly the group's central concerns with the ideological implications of form, with the idea of a positive construction and deconstruction of meaning, and with what has come to be called the 'productivity' of language" (1979: 118–19).

In Hebdige's earlier worldviews, deviance becomes a statement of form, not merely in terms of resistance to the other, but for its own sake.

Blackshaw and Crabbe not only re-postulate this positive statement of form, but also call for a more nuanced view of deviance, one that goes beyond the simple binaries of "conformist" and "deviant." In this way, and following Rorty, they call for a greater refinement of deviance, to include "ethnocentric communities [that] continually compete for time, space and partnership" (2004: 13).

To approach an understanding of deviance, then, is a multilayered, multifaceted effort that takes into account individual cases and points of view.

In terms of what Flynn and Gerhardt (1989) label “the Silent Brotherhood” in America many groups emerge: among them are such varied-yet-loosely-connected groups as the Aryan Nations Church (the Church of Jesus Christ Christian); the Covenant, the Sword, and the Arm of the Lord (CSA); the National Alliance; the Ku Klux Klan; Posse Comitatus; the “Reformed Church of Christ–Society of Saints (a front of the Socialist Nationalist Aryan Peoples Party)”; the White American Bastion (of the *Bruders Schweigen*, or, the Order); the Ministry of Christ Church; the John Birch Society; and the Christian Patriot Defense League, to name just a few (cf. Flynn and Gerhardt 1989; Aho 1990). The fact of so many slightly different, nuanced groups’ existing demonstrates the importance of their individual salience to group members, though some members enter into and exit from a variety of organizations over their lifespans as “Christian patriots” (Aho 1990, 1994).

One interesting fluctuation in group membership is noted by Aho (1990), who describes a striking coincidental timing between white male uncertainty due to economic loss and encroachments by women and minorities, and a growing perception of the ZOG, against which many “Silent Brotherhood” members were encouraged to strive. In this way, Aho implies, Christian patriot groups may act as a barometer for what is considered mainstream and ordered, and what the borders of such order may be within the United States.

These radical-conservative groups, Aho (1990) points out, are self-described as Christian Patriots—thus, they acknowledge their deviance from the normative and/or dominant culture while still professing their “correct” worldview. Embedded within their literature is the acknowledgement and hatred of the ZOG, for example. But their voice and power are symptomatic of dissent itself, rising and falling, respectively, with the cultural, real, and symbolic dominance of more liberal, and then more conservative administrations in the United States. They, just as the radical so-called “eco-terrorists” of the member groups People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and the Earth Liberation Front (ELF), act as cultural balances for the mainstream and more dominant view, as a form of cultural “backlash” against the strictures of the socially-constructed mainstream: in this sense, as well, PETA and ELF are also considered deviant.

But the dominant view waxes and wanes as the media highlight it: thus, at any moment in time, the media may have a story to tell about whatever group they choose—and by the very act of telling the story, the group receives a glimmer of celebrity. The relationship between group, group adherents, and media is one of the key threads of popular and populist culture that inscribes both these Christian Patriots and the groups rejecting their worldviews. And certainly gun culture and the elements of “play” imbricate themselves into the fertile mix, especially when such groups as Richard Butler’s Aryan Nations Church attempt to inculcate values into male youth by means of socialization tactics.

Blackshaw and Crabbe note the media effects upon sport practices, now considered “deviant” sport practices because of the construction of such practices in large part by the media itself. In the case of Christian patriots, some of the victims of “consumptive and performative deviance” are obvious: the dead include the Jewish news radio talk-show host Alan Berg, assassinated in his driveway with a fully automatic MAC-10, in Denver, Colorado, in 1984 (Flynn and Gerhardt 1989: 203–10); “in 1979, an alliance of Klansmen and neo-Nazis resulted in the killing of five labor organizers in Greensboro, North Carolina ...” (Langer 2003: 269); Aho lists fifty-one fatalities directly “related to American Right-Wing Activity” between the years 1980 and 1985 (1990: 8–9).

Notwithstanding Blackshaw and Crabbe’s difficulty with the very concept of “deviance,” Becker’s portrayal of deviance seems a good fit for media-saturated determinations of what constitutes deviance from what is considered (by the media) as normative: the idea of deviance is dependent upon “*social groups [who] create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance*” (1973: 9)—and key among those social groups are the media.

Butler’s Vision of the Aryan Homeland1

In the 1960s, Richard G. Butler was a retired aerospace engineer in California, and associated with the founder of Christian Identity, Wesley Swift. Much has been written about Butler; as well, much of it reads like an origination myth, suggesting the self-promotional rhetoric that charismatic leaders learn to reify over time—and that others utilize as encapsulated “truths.” The following “facts” of Butler’s inception of the Aryan Nations seem to establish a similar kind of origination *mythos* for the group(s):

- In 1973, Butler moves to the Hayden Lake, Idaho, area, intending to create a base for his Church of Jesus Christ Christian. He hosts the “Pacific Kingdom Identity Conference” in 1979, which provides a springboard for his attempts to align such fairly diverse groups as the Ku Klux Klan, neo-Nazis, Posse Comitatus, and others during the 1980s—hoping to establish a “White Homeland” in the Pacific Northwest. In 1982, Butler convenes the first annual “Aryan World Congress.” Militant groups from these congresses begin to form, with such known leaders as Robert Mathews splintering away from Butler.² Butler attracts more militants, calling for a racial holy war (Northwest Coalition for Human Dignity 2000).
- In 1989, Butler sponsors the Aryan Youth Action Conference, “it’s [sic] first racist skinhead gathering. The event, held the weekend closest to Hitler’s birthday (April 20th), attracts just over 100 attendees. Over the years, conferences have included activities such as Aryan Olympics, survival classes, and swastika lighting” (Northwest Coalition for Human Dignity 2000: 24). Butler continues to reach out to youth annually, and the Aryan Nations sponsor

highly-visible parades in downtown Coeur d'Alene, Idaho (Northwest Coalition for Human Dignity 2000).

- But Butler does receive a lot of attention, some of it worldwide. For example, a Helsinki, Finland, newspaper reports in 1987:

For 12 years, Butler has commanded a small society in Idaho's backwoods. Into the woods a church, a printing facility, a shooting range, and a watch tower have been built. And the word has spread against the Jews, against the Catholics, against the Blacks, against the Chicanos ... (Hassen, trans., 1987, ms.)

- This kind of attention leads Butler to proclaim his Hayden Lake property as "the world headquarters" for the Aryan Nations.
- Butler drew many like-thinking individuals to his compound, including Floyd Cochran, who was appointed Aryan Nations' chief recruiter, and took the group's racist message to young people with music videos. Calm, articulate, with a knack for the headline-catching phrase, Cochran quickly became the group's national spokesperson. Aryan Nations' chief, the Rev. Richard Butler, proudly called him "the next Goebbels" (Hochschild 1994, <http://www.mojones.com/news/update/1994/05/hochschild.html>, accessed July 11, 2005).

Aryan Nations Compound Culture

Though there were many "types" of Christian patriots flocking to the Aryan Nations compound in Hayden Lake during the 1980s and 1990s, and though they apparently exchanged ideas and ideological stances in some ways, to classify them all with the same broad strokes would be a gross misrepresentation. Tanner (1995) writes of the inaccurate media phenomenon of glossing different ideological groups together—though, as has already been somewhat established, a variety of similarities between the groups can be understood as well.

Tanner (1995), writing in the mid-1990s, classifies four broad categories of "armed groups and associations" within the United States to be:

- The criminal racists, tax protesters, radical environmentalists, and political groups committed to violent revolution. These are people with narrowly focused agendas who will deliberately break the law in pursuit of their agendas. Examples include the Ku Klux Klan, the Posse Comitatus, the Black Panthers, the Weathermen, the Freemen, and some environmental and animal rights groups.
- Peaceful survivalists, racial separatists, and religious cult groups. These include Mormon polygamists, the Universal Church Triumphant, Bo Gritz, the Branch Davidians, and similar survivalist groups.
- The loners and the Walter Mittys. These are angry individuals who personalize their war with government.
- The armed, but legitimate, political activists. This is a new phenomenon, at

least in this century. These are socially successful people who respect and obey the law, but who are organizing and arming themselves because they fear they may be attacked by agencies of their own government (1995: 43–4).

Chief among the groups gravitating and invited to the Aryan Nations World Congress were groups from the first category, including the National Alliance, Ku Klux Klan, and the Silent Brotherhood/The Order. As well, skinheads flocked to the compound for the summer gatherings. It was a fertile spot for individuals of similar, yet not identical, worldviews.

Among the worldviews the groups shared were attitudes that the former member Floyd Cochran now characterizes as follows:

... nobody in the racist movement gets blamed for anything. My marriage didn't work? It's not my fault, it's because I was a racial activist and my wife couldn't stand it. I didn't graduate from high school? It's because my Jewish English teacher didn't like me. If you couldn't find a job—hey, it's not your fault, it's the Jews'. Or it's because of affirmative action ... even though northern Idaho is 98 percent white! (Hothschild, 1994, <http://www.mojones.com/news/update/1994/05/hochschild.html>, accessed July 11, 2005)

Another facet of the World Congresses included the physical layout:

... life inside the Idaho compound [included] watchtowers, Nazi and Confederate flags, a wedding in which the young couple marches under arms raised in 'Heil Hitler' salutes. The Aryan Nations' various outposts can contain everything from firing ranges to printing presses to schools for the children. The women do all the cooking. (Hothschild, 1994, <http://www.mojones.com/news/update/1994/05/hochschild.html>, accessed July 11, 2005, emphasis added)

The gun and weapon culture within the Aryan Nations compound was, by all accounts, pervasive and reflective of a hypermasculinist culture that aligned gun-use with masculinity. According to Flynn and Gerhardt, survivalist groups utilized training camp strategies:

Over the last two decades, America's backwoods became dotted with survivalist training camps. A Klan-run camp in Anahuac, Texas, taught guerrilla warfare techniques. A Christian survival school deep in the Arkansas Ozarks taught urban warfare in a silhouette city constructed Hollywood set-style in the forest. The leader of the Carolina Knights of the KKK, Frazier Glenn Miller, claimed a thousand men would answer his trumpet call at Angier, North Carolina, and that they'd be dressed not in white sheets but in combat fatigues, ready for race war. (1989: 10)

According to the Anti-Defamation League website on Richard Butler, the Aryan Nations compound was "patrolled by a security force of armed guards

and dogs" ("Extremism in America," http://www.adl.org/learn/Ext_US/butler.asp?xpicked= 2&item=2, accessed December 15, 2005). One of the primary members of the compound, David Lane, a KKK activist, "... had an AK-47, showing the virtues of it" to everyone around the compound (personal correspondence, Norman Gissel, 5 January 2006). Additionally, "those attending the annual Aryan World Congress also plan[ned] to fire their weapons at a rifle range near Fernan Lake ..." during the World Congress in 2001 (Morlin and Clouse 2001: B1).

Guns and gun culture, for hunting game, are a part of the surrounding Idaho ethos. Thus, one method Butler used to split opposition to his racist tactics was to create some dissonance in the opposition: by dint of his inventing, developing, and supporting a hypermasculinist culture, many of the other groups that were drawn to gun culture, such as survivalists, felt that parts of the message of anti-government freedoms resonated well for them. This tenuous entry into the recruitment of volunteers for his Aryan Homeland in the Pacific Northwest was, to Butler, a valid form of recruitment. Additionally, within the hypermasculinist culture was a concomitant diminished role for women: recall that while there was a school on the compound for children, the women did all the cooking. The advent of women's rights, which were wrought in the larger culture throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, created a parallel backlash against feminism, women's rights, and egalitarianism—much like the backlashes against gay rights, and civil rights for people of color, women, and gay and lesbian populations. (The "cult of masculinity," of course, does not always have such an antithetical stance towards persons of color, gay rights, or women's rights; but the popular culture and populist ideologies and stereotypes of these adherents of the "cult of masculinity" reinforce such backlash political stances.)

Also, "Butler had a cult of promoting guns, just because it promoted masculinity" (personal correspondence, Norman Gissel, January 5, 2006). There was a strong sense of a masculine culture within the compound, and particularly during the times of both the Aryan Youth Action Conference held near to Adolf Hitler's birthday, and the Aryan World Congresses held in the summer.

The linkages between gun-use, the Aryan hypermasculinist, hyper-racist philosophy, and masculinity itself tie back to popular culture and populist perceptions (largely media-fed) of "what Christian patriots" should do and ought to do. They carried guns, they target-shot, and some of the armed guards became over-zealous in their use of force—much to the dismay of Butler, who was sued in a claim for damages that arose from one incident. They also "offered para-military training in urban terrorism and guerrilla warfare ..." ("Aryan Nations/Church of Jesus Christ Christian, http://www.adl.org/learn/ext_us/Aryan_nations.asp?xpicked=3&item=11, accessed August 3, 2005).

Socialization of Children into Aryan Nations: The Academy, the “Adolf Hitler Memorial” Conference

One of the other things the Aryan Nations attempted at the Aryan compound in Hayden Lake was try to indoctrinate children into the racist (what they termed “racialized”) doctrine. There was a school on site, the Aryan Nations Academy, and an Aryan Youth Action Conference (sub-headed the “Adolf Hitler Memorial” in 1994), which was begun in 1989 by inviting “neo-Nazi skinheads ... [to] its first racist skinhead gathering, entitled the ‘Skinhead Solution Seminar’” (The Northwest Coalition Against Malicious Harassment 1994: 1.21).

Headed by Tom Bentley, the principal of the Aryan Academy encouraged children of residents living in the Aryan Nations compound to attend the school:

In the early 1980s, an “Aryan Nations Academy” was established to inculcate the group’s philosophy in the minds of local youngsters. In 1982, an informational mailing claimed that the “academy” had 15 full-time students, preschool through grade eight. In addition, youth conferences attracting numerous skinheads were held in April to coincide with Hitler’s birthday. (Aryan Nations/Church of Jesus Christ Christian, http://www.adl.org/learn/ext_us/Aryan_nations.asp?xpicked=3&item=11, accessed August 3, 2005)

In concert with the attempts to attract youth to the White Supremacist/Skinhead movement, which was rapidly influencing the Aryan Nations’ worldview, an Aryan Youth Action Conference was begun. Skinheads, Aryan leaders, KKK leaders, and so forth met with youth during these conferences. Seeking to find “popular culture” items that would attract youth to the movement, activities that supported the masculinist, racist culture were trumpeted, so that:

Johnny Bangeter’s Christian Identity Skinheads, affiliated with the Army of Israel from Utah, played as did a Vancouver, British Columbia band, Odin’s Law. The Conference also featured Survival Classes, Aryan Olympics, a Swastika burning and a bonfire, drinking and a “slam pit” for dancing to racist rock ’n’ roll. [Justin] Dwyer and Elisabeth Bullis were married during the swastika burning. Neo-Nazi Harry Schmidt, the chair of the Washington State Populist Party, also attended the gathering, apparently looking for good “political soldiers” to use as fodder. (The Northwest Coalition Against Malicious Harassment 1994: 1.22)

The blend of skinheads with Aryan youth—and with other so-called “White Supremacist” groups—at the Aryan Youth Action Conferences was a deliberate strategy to create critical mass for the group’s goals. Thus, deliberate forms of socialization were performed: youth in attendance could look to the “celebrities” of the Christian patriot and White Supremacist movements, could be entranced

by the performance of a “Soldier’s Ransom”—a “racist kind of church service where they anoint Aryan soldiers and weapons. There were certain cross-burnings where they would anoint or bless their weapon as part of God’s war” (personal correspondence, Bill Morlin, October 25, 2005).

One flyer that was put out for the Aryan Youth Action Conference in 1994 has a caricature of a chiseled male in uniform, legs akimbo, holding a flagpole (which has a Nazi flag, with swastika prominent) in one hand, with a female embracing him, eyes closed. He appears to be boldly looking forward, almost striding towards the future. Next to this cartoon are written: “Youth Speeches, Survival Classes, Skinhead Bands, Aryan Olympics, Swastika Lighting, Book & Flag Burning, Bonfire” (cited from Northwest Coalition Against Malicious Harassment, 1994: 1.21).

The plans to create critical mass by home-growing youth, not unlike Hitler’s Youth Groups,³ however, did not last, at least in this incarnation: Butler died in 2002, and the Aryan Nations’ so-called “homeland” was bankrupted, and then transferred to Potter County, Pennsylvania. According to the “Aryan Nations: Kindred Awake!” website (<http://www.ryan-nations.org/about.htm>, accessed January 16, 2006), the major goals of the organization have changed to “the spread of subversion and the aid of all forms which are a liability and are inimical in nature to the current Judaic-tyrannical state of affairs” in what is described as the “Zionist social control.” The website calls, therefore, for an “Aryan jihad,” not so much based on armed conflict as on subversion of the so-called “Zionist Occupation Government” structure.

Conclusion: Aryans, Huizinga’s “Play,” and Gun Culture

Clearly, through much of the often-hysterical rhetoric of the White Supremacist literature (including websites, news reports, and interviews with the participants), and particularly the Aryan Nations’ literature, there exist consistent, almost mythic origination stories. Within these stories, gun culture is a given.

The presence of guns, weapons, and destructive force varies from group to group, so that the “Silent Brotherhood” (or The Order) appears to have been a violent arm of the less-overtly violent Aryan Nations group. In the whole of the culture of the Aryan Nations’ compound, however, there was a hypermasculinist culture that celebrated weaponry and its use, if only symbolically. As Butler is said to have stated: “The pen may be mightier than the sword, but a .38 always trumps it” (personal correspondence, Tony Stewart, January 5, 2006). There was always the rhetoric of paranoia, and of violence, so that, during and after each World Congress, violent attacks against citizens in the greater Spokane, Washington, area rose (personal correspondence, Bill Morlin, October 25, 2005). There was also the opportunity to learn “urban guerilla warfare techniques,” for example from Col. Gordon “Jack” Mohr, who is said to have “conducted a two-day seminar in urban guerilla warfare” (Flynn and Gerhardt 1989:

230). The Congresses appear to have fomented violent action, where speakers called for an “Aryan jihad” and such events as gun practice were encouraged. In fact, targets depicting an interracial couple—with just the heads of a white woman and a black man showing—were pasted around the grounds for target practice.

Equally clear is the sense of the Aryan Nations that rules exist. Though the “play” is deadly serious, in this worldview, an “Aryan jihad” contains rules: such rules as fairness of weaponry between what they perceive to be the Zionist Occupation Government and the Christian patriot movement exist for these White Supremacist groups. However, since their worldview does not allow for equality between themselves and women, themselves and people of color, and themselves and Jewish (and sometimes Catholic) citizenry, the rules tend toward slippage towards these groups and their members. Thus, the use of guns against unarmed members of these groups appears to be seen as an appropriate usage. One example is the assassination of the unarmed radio host Alan Berg.

Though there is a sense of “play” in the way that Huizinga characterizes it—albeit the deadly, cynical forms of play—many of the Aryan Nations members see themselves as in the fight to establish their own geographical white “homeland.” As Richard Butler said, the Aryan Nations’ goal is “to form a national racial state. We shall have it at whatever price is necessary. Just as our forefathers purchased their freedom in blood so must we. We will have to kill the bastards” (cited in “MIPT Terrorism Knowledge Base,” <http://www.tkb.org/Group.jsp?groupID=29>, accessed January 31, 2006).

This setting of rules and establishment of rhetorical stances, this call for the understanding of a worldview, smacks of Huizinga’s play in the sense that there is a deliberate “notification” of all concerned parties what the goals are, how the Aryans intend to accomplish their goals, and why. Though branches of the Aryan Nations, particularly the Order, called for and accomplished unlawful and violent acts, acts seemingly without rules, it was when the Skinheads—anarchic, non-rule-abiding, and what one person described as “highly dysfunctional” socially (personal correspondence, Tony Stewart, January 5, 2006)—and the White Underground movements came in contact with and influenced the direction of the Aryan Nations, that Huizinga’s sense of “play” began to erode.

The use of guns, masculine identity culture, and the socialization of youth in programs geared toward creating the so-called Aryan Homeland were linked together for forty-five years. The effort at establishing a visible, overt Aryan Homeland in the Pacific Northwest was effectively staunched by the counter-establishment of Human Rights groups mostly centered in Idaho. These groups, amazingly enough, did not rely on gun culture or gun-culture mentality to accomplish their ends of social justice; rather, they used education, visibility, and common sense to portray the Aryan Nations as worthy of public ridicule.